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Webster, Daniel
Mr. Webster's speech
at Marshfield, Mass.

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MR. WEBSTER'S SPEECH

AT

MARSHFIELD,

AND HIS

SPEECH ON THE OREGON BILL.

MR. WEBSTER'S SPEECH

AT

MARSHFIELD, MASS.

DELIVERED SEPTEMBER 1, 1848,

AND HIS

SPEECH ON THE OREGON BILL,

DELIVERED IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE,

AUGUST 12, 1848.

BOSTON:
PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN, 24 CONGRESS STREET.
1848.

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The following correspondence explains the occasion of the Meeting at Marshfield, at which Mr. Webster's Speech was delivered.

MARSHFIELD, MS., AUG. 2, 1848.

Hon. DANIEL WEBSTER:

DEAR SIR,—The undersigned, Whigs and fellow citizens of yours, are desirous of seeing and conferring with you on the subject of our National Policy, and of hearing your opinions freely expressed thereon. We look anxiously on the present prospect of public affairs, and on the position in which the Whig party, and especially Northern Whigs, are now placed. We should be grieved indeed to see Gen. Cass—so decided an opponent of all those measures which we think essential to the honor and interests of the country and the prosperity of all classes—elected to the Chief Magistracy. On the other hand, it is not to be concealed, that there is much discontent with the nomination made by the late Philadelphia Convention, of a Southern man, a military man, fresh from bloody fields, and known only by his sword, as a Whig candidate for the Presidency.

So far as is in our humble ability, we desire to preserve the Union and the Whig Party, and to perpetuate Whig principles; but we wish to see also that these principles may be preserved, and this Union perpetuated, in a manner consistent with the rights of the Free States, and the prevention of the farther extension of the Slave power; and we dread the effects of the precedent—which we think eminently dangerous, and as not exhibiting us in a favorable light to the Nations of the Earth—of elevating a mere military man to the Presidency.

We think a crisis is upon us; and we would gladly know how we may best discharge our duties as true Americans, honest men, and good Whigs. To you, who have been so long in public life, and are able from your great experience and unrivalled ability to give us information and advice, and upon whom, as neighbors and friends, we think we have some claims, we naturally look, and we should be exceedingly gratified if, in any way, public or private, you would express your opinion upon interesting public questions now pending, with that boldness and distinctness with which you are accustomed to declare your sentiments. If you can concur with our wishes, please signify to us in what manner it would be most agreeable to you that they should be carried into effect.

With very great regard,

Your Obedient Servants,

DANIEL PHILLIPS,
GEORGE LEONARD,
GEO. H. WETHERBEE,
and many others.

To this invitation Mr. Webster returned the following reply:—

MARSHFIELD, AUG. 3, 1848.

GENTLEMEN,—I have received your letter. The critical state of things at Washington obliges me to think it my duty to repair thither immediately and take my seat in the Senate, notwithstanding the state of my health and the heat of the weather render it disagreeable for me to leave home.

I cannot, therefore, comply with your wishes at present; but on my return, if such should continue to be your desire, I will meet you and the other Whigs of Marshfield, in an unceremonious manner, that we may confer upon the topics to which your letter relates.

I am, Gentlemen, with esteem and friendship,

Your obliged fellow citizen,

DANIEL WEBSTER.

To Messrs. DANIEL PHILLIPS, GEORGE LEONARD, GEO. H. WETHERBEE, and others.

Soon after Mr. Webster's return, it was arranged that the Meeting should take place at the "Winslow House," the ancient seat of the Winslow Family, now forming a part of Mr. Webster's farm,—on Friday, the first day of September.

SPEECH.

Although it is not my purpose, during the recess of Congress, to address public assemblies on political subjects, I have felt it my duty to comply with your request, as neighbors and townsmen, and to meet you to-day; and I am not unwilling to avail myself of this occasion to signify to the people of the United States my opinions upon the present state of our public affairs. I shall perform that duty, certainly with great frankness, I hope with candor. It is not my intention to-day to endeavor to carry any point, to act as any man's advocate, to put up or put down any body. I wish, and I propose, to address you in the language and in the spirit of conference and consultation. In the present extraordinary crisis of our public concerns, I desire to hold no man's conscience but my own. My own opinions I shall communicate, freely and fearlessly, with equal disregard to consequences, whether they respect myself or respect others.

We are on the eve of a highly important Presidential election. In two or three months the people of this country will be called upon to elect an Executive Chief Magistrate of the United States; and all see, and all feel, that great interests of the country are to be affected, for good or evil, by the results of that election.

Of the interesting subjects over which the person who shall be elected must necessarily exercise more or less control, there are especially three, vitally connected, in my judgment, with the honor and happiness of the country.

In the first place, the honor and happiness of the country imperatively require, that there shall be a chief magistrate elected who shall not plunge us into further wars of ambition and conquest.

And in the second place, in my judgment, the interests of the country and the feeling of a vast majority of the People require that a President of these United States should be elected, who will neither use official influence to promote, nor who feels any desire in his heart to promote, the further extension of Slavery in this community, [*Great cheering*,] or the further influence of it in the public councils.

In the third place, if I have any just estimate, if an experience, (not now a short one,) in public affairs has enabled me to know any thing of what the public interest demands, in the next place I say, that the state of the country does require an essential reform in the system of revenue and finance, such as shall restore the prosperity, by promoting the industry and fostering the labor of the country, in its various branches.

There are other things important. I will not allude to them. These three I hold to be essential.

There are three candidates presented to the choice of the American people:

General Taylor is the Whig candidate, standing upon the nomination of the Whig Convention. General Cass is the candidate of the opposing and now dominant party in the country; and a third candidate is presented in the person of Mr. Van Buren, by a convention of citizens assembled at

Buffalo, whose object, or whose main object, as it appears to me, is contained in one of those considerations which I have mentioned; and that is, the prevention of the further increase of slavery. An object in which you and I, gentlemen, so far as that goes, entirely concur with them, I am sure.

Most of us who are here to-day are Whigs, National Whigs, Massachusetts Whigs, Old Colony Whigs, and Marshfield Whigs, [*Cheers*]; and if the Whig nomination made at Philadelphia were entirely satisfactory to the people of Massachusetts and to us, our path of duty would be plain.

But the nomination of a candidate for the Presidency made by the Whig Convention at Philadelphia, is not satisfactory to the Whigs of Massachusetts; that is certain: and it would be idle to attempt to conceal the fact. It is now more just and more patriotic, it is more manly and practical, to take facts as they are, and things as they are, and to deduce our own conviction of duty from what exists before us.

However respectable and distinguished in the line of his own profession, or however estimable as a private citizen, Gen. Taylor is a military man, and a military man merely. He has had no training in civil affairs. He has performed no functions of a civil nature under the Constitution of his country. He has been known, and is known, only by his brilliant achievements at the head of an army.

Now the Whigs of Massachusetts, and I among them, are of opinion that it was not wise, nor discreet, to go to the army for the selection of a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. It is the first instance in our history in which any man of mere military character has been proposed for that high office.

Gen. Washington was a great military character; but by far a greater civil character. He had been employed in the councils of his country from the earliest dawn of the Revolution. He had been in the Continental Congress, he had established a great character for civil wisdom and judgment. After the war, as you know, he was elected a member of that Convention which formed the Constitution of the United States; and it is one of the most honorable tributes ever paid to him, that by that assembly of good and wise men he was selected to preside over their deliberations. And he put his name first and foremost, to the Constitution under which we live.

President Harrison was bred a soldier, and at different periods of his life rendered important military services. But President Harrison, nevertheless, was, for a much greater period of his life, employed in civil, than in military service. For twenty years he was either Governor of a Territory, member of one or the other House of Congress, or Minister abroad; and discharged all these duties to the satisfaction of his country.

This case, therefore, stands by itself; without a precedent or justification from any thing in our previous history. It is for this reason, as I imagine, that the Whigs of Massachusetts feel dissatisfied with this nomination. There may be others, there are others; they are, perhaps, of less importance and more easily to be answered. But this is a well-founded objection; and in my opinion it ought to have prevailed, and to have prevented this nomination. I know enough of history to see the dangerous tendency of such resorts to military popularity.

But, if I may borrow a mercantile expression, I may now venture to say, that there is another side to this account. The impartiality with which I propose to discharge my duty to-day, leads me to consider of that. And in the first place, it is to be considered, that Gen. Taylor has been nominated by a Whig Convention, holden in conformity with the usages of the

Whig party, and fairly nominated, so far as I know. It is to be considered, also, that he is the only Whig before the people, as a candidate for the Presidency; and no citizen of the country, with any effect, can vote for any other Whig, let his preferences be what they might or may.

In the next place, it is proper to consider the personal character of Gen. Taylor, and his political opinions, relations and connections, so far as they are known.

Now, gentlemen, in advancing to a few observations on this part of the case, I wish every body to understand that I have no personal acquaintance whatever with Gen. Taylor. I never saw him but once, and that but for a few moments in the Senate. The sources of information are open to you, as well as to me, from which I derive what I know of his character and opinions. But I have endeavored to obtain access to those sources. I have endeavored to inform and instruct myself by communication with those who have known him in his profession as a soldier, in his associations as a man, in his conversations and opinions on political subjects; and I will tell you frankly what I think of him, according to the best lights which I have been able to obtain.

I need not say, that he is a skillful, brave and gallant soldier. That is admitted by all. With me, all that goes but very little way to make out the proper qualifications for President of the United States. But what is more important, I believe that he is an entirely honest and upright man. I believe that he is modest, clear-headed, of independent and manly character, possessing a mind trained by proper discipline and self-control. I believe that he is estimable and amiable in all the relations of private life. I believe that he possesses a reputation for equity and fair judgment, which gives him an influence over those under his command, beyond what is conferred by the authority of station. I believe that he is a man possessing the confidence and attachment of all who have been near him and know him. And I believe, that if elected President, he will do his best to relieve the country from present evils, and guard it against future dangers. So much for what I think of the personal character of Gen. Taylor.

I will say, too, that so far as I have observed, his conduct since he has been a candidate for the office of President, has been irreproachable. I hear no intrigue imputed to him, no contumelious treatment of rivals. I do not find him making promises or holding out hopes to any men or any party. I do not find him putting forth any pretensions of his own, and therefore I think of him very much as he seems to think of himself, that he is an honest man, of an independent mind and of upright intentions. And as to his qualifications for the Presidency, he has himself nothing to say about it.

And now, friends and fellow townsmen, with respect to his political opinions and relations, I can say at once, that I believe him to be a Whig; I believe him to hold to the main doctrines of the Whig party. To think otherwise, would be to impute to him a degree of tergiversation and fraudulent deception, of which I suppose him to be entirely incapable.

Gentlemen, it is worth our while to consider in what manner General Taylor has become a candidate for the Presidency of the United States.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that he was made such merely by the nomination of the Philadelphia Convention; for he had been nominated for the Presidency in a great many States, by various conventions and meetings of the people, a year before the Convention at Philadelphia assembled.

Gentlemen, the whole history of the world shows, whether in the most civilized or the most barbarous ages, that the affections and admiration of mankind are always easily carried away towards successful military achievements. The story of all Republics, and all free Governments show this. And we know in the case now before us, that so soon as brilliant success had attended Gen. Taylor's operations on the Rio Grande, at Palo Alto and other places, spontaneous nominations sprang up for him.

And here let me say, that, generally, these were Whig nominations. Not universally, but generally, these nominations, made at various times before the assembly of the Philadelphia Convention, were Whig nominations. General Taylor was esteemed, from the moment that his military achievements brought him into public notice, as a Whig General.

You all remember that when we were discussing his merits in Congress, upon the question of giving thanks to the army under his command, and to himself, among other questions, the friends and supporters of Mr. Polk's administration denounced him as being, and because he was, a Whig General.

My friends near me, whom I am happy to see here, belonging to the House of Representatives, will remember that a leading man of the party of the Administration declared in his place in Congress, that the policy of the Administration connected with the Mexican war would never prosper, till the President recalled those Whig Generals, Scott and Taylor. The policy was a Democratic policy. The argument was, that the men to carry out this policy should be Democratic men. The officers to fight the battles should be Democratic officers, and on that ground, the ordinary vote of thanks was refused to Gen. Taylor, on the part of the friends of the Administration.

Let me remark, in the next place, that there was no particular purpose connected with the advancement of Slavery, entertained, generally, by those who nominated him. As I have said, they were Whig nominations, more in the Middle and Northern, than in the Southern States, and by persons who never entertained the slightest desire, by his nomination, or by any other means, to extend the area of slavery of the human race, or the influence of the slave-holding States in the Councils of the Nation.

The Quaker city of Philadelphia nominated Gen. Taylor; the Whigs all over the Union nominated him, with no such view. A great convention was assembled in New York, of highly influential and respectable gentlemen, very many of them well known to me, and they nominated Gen. Taylor with no such view. Gen. Taylor's nomination was hailed, not very extensively, but by some enthusiastic and not very far-seeing people in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

There were, even among us, in our own State, Whigs quite early enough, certainly, in manifesting their confidence in this nomination; a little too early, it may be, in uttering notes of exultation in our anticipated triumph. It would have been better if they had waited.

Now the truth is, gentlemen, the truth is, and no man can avoid seeing it, unless, as sometimes happens, the object is too near our eyes to be distinctly discerned, the truth is, that in these nominations, and also in the nomination at Philadelphia, in these Conventions, and also in the Convention at Philadelphia, Gen. Taylor was nominated exactly for this reason: That, believing him to be a Whig, they thought he could be chosen more easily than any other Whig. This is the whole of it. That sagacious, wise, far-seeing doctrine of availability, lies at the bottom of the whole matter. [*Tremendous enthusiasm and applause.*]

So far, then, from imputing any motive to these Conventions over the country, or to the Convention in Philadelphia, as operating on a majority of the members to promote slavery by the nomination of Gen. Taylor, I do not believe a word of it,—not one word. I see that one part of what is called the platform of the Buffalo Convention, says that the candidates before the public were nominated under the dictation of the slave power. I do not believe a word of it. [*Applause.*]

In the first place, the Convention at Philadelphia was composed, in a very great majority, by members from the Free States. By a very great majority they might have nominated any body they chose.

But the Free States did not choose to nominate a Free State man, or a Northern man; even our neighbors, the States of New England, with the exception of New Hampshire and a part of Maine, neither proposed nor concurred in the nomination of any Northern man; Vermont would hear nothing but the nomination of a Southern and slaveholding candidate; Connecticut was of the same mind, and so was Rhode Island; the North made no demand, nor presented any request for a Northern candidate; nor attempted any union among themselves for the purpose of promoting the nomination of such a candidate.

They were content to take their choice among the candidates of the South. It is preposterous, therefore, to pretend that a candidate from the Slave States has been forced upon the North by Southern dictation.

And in the next place, it is true that there were persons from New England, most zealous and active, and who were most earnest in procuring the nomination of Gen. Taylor, and men who would cut off their right hands before they would do any thing to promote slavery in the United States. I do not admire their policy, indeed I have very little respect for it, understand that; but I acquit them of bad motives. I know the leading men in that Convention. I think I understand the motives that governed them. Their reasoning was this: "Gen. Taylor is a Whig; not eminent in civil life, not known in civil life, but still a man of sound Whig principles. Circumstances have given him a reputation and eclat in the country. If he shall be the Whig candidate, he will be chosen; and with him, there will come into the two Houses of Congress an augmentation of Whig strength. The Whig majority in the House of Representatives will be increased. The Loco Foco majority in the Senate will be diminished. That was the view, and such was the motive, however wise or however unwise, that governed a very large majority of those who composed the Convention at Philadelphia.

Now, gentlemen, in my opinion this was a wholly unwise policy; it was short-sighted and temporising on questions of great principles. But I acquit those who adopted it of any such motives as have been ascribed to them, and especially what has been ascribed to them in a part of this Buffalo Platform.

Such, gentlemen, are the circumstances connected with the nomination of Gen. Taylor. I only repeat, that those who had the most agency originally in bringing him before the people, were Whig Conventions, and Whig meetings in the several States, Free States, and, that a great majority of that Convention which nominated him in Philadelphia were from the Free States and might have rejected him if they had chosen, and selected any body else on whom they could have united.

This is the case, gentlemen, as far as I can discern it, and exercising upon it as impartial a judgment as I can form, this is the case presented to

the Whigs, so far as respects the personal fitness and personal character of Gen. Taylor, and the circumstances which have caused his nomination.

Now, fellow citizens, if we were weighing the propriety of nominating such a person to the Presidency, it would be one thing; if we are considering the expediency, or I may say the necessity, (which to some minds may seem to be the case,) of well meaning and patriotic Whigs supporting him after he is nominated, that is quite another thing. And that leads to the consideration of what the Whigs of Massachusetts are to do, or such of them as do not see fit to support Gen. Taylor. Of course they must vote for Gen. Cass; or they must vote for Mr. Van Buren; or they must omit to vote at all.

I agree that there are cases in which, if we do not know in what direction to move, we ought to stand still till we do. I admit that there are cases in which, if one does not know what to do, he had better not do he knows not what. But on a question so important to ourselves and the country; on a question of a popular election under Constitutional forms in which it is impossible that every man's private judgment can prevail, or every man's private choice succeed, it becomes a question of conscientious duty and patriotism, what it is best to do upon the whole. And that leads to the considerations which should influence Whigs, in my opinion, upon the question now before us.

Under the practical administration of the Constitution of the United States, there cannot be a great range of personal choice in regard to the candidate for the Presidency. In order that their votes may be effective, men must give them for some one of those who are prominently before the public. This is the necessary result of our forms of government, and from the provisions of the Constitution And it does, therefore, bring men sometimes to the necessity of choosing between candidates, neither of whom would be their original, personal choice.

Now, what is the contingency? What is the alternative presented to the Whigs of Massachusetts? In my judgment, fellow citizens, it is merely one: the question is between Gen. Taylor and Gen. Cass. And that is the only question. [*Great sensation.*]

I am no more skilled to foresee political occurrences than others. I judge only for myself. But, in my opinion, there is not the least probability of any other result than the choice of Gen. Taylor or Gen. Cass.

I know that the enthusiasm of a new-formed party, that the popularity of a new-formed name, without communicating any new-formed idea, [*Enthusiasm*] may lead men to think that the sky is to fall, and that larks are suddenly to be taken. I entertain no such expectations. I speak without disrespect of the Free Soil Party. I have read their platform, and though I think there are some unsound places in it, I can stand on it pretty well. But I see nothing in it both new and valuable. What is valuable is not new, and what is new is not valuable.

If the term of Free Soil party, or Free Soil men, designate those who are fixed, and unalterably fixed, in favor of the restriction of slavery, are so to day and were so yesterday, and have been so for some time, [*Laughter*] then I hold myself to be as good a Free Soil man as any of the Buffalo Convention. [*Much clapping.*] I pray to know who is to put beneath my feet a freer soil than that upon which I have stood ever since I have been in public life? I pray to know who is to make my lips freer than they always have been, or to inspire into my breast a more resolute and fixed determination to resist the advances and encroachments of the slave power

than has inhabited it since I, for the first time, opened my mouth in the councils of the country? [*Great excitement.*]

The gentlemen at Buffalo have placed at the head of their party, Mr. Van Buren, a gentleman for whom I have all the respect that I should entertain for one with whom I have been associated, in some degree, in public life for many years, and who has held the highest offices in the country. But really, speaking for myself, if I were to express confidence in Mr. Van Buren and his politics on any question, and most especially this very question of slavery, I think the scene would border upon the ludicrous, if not upon the contemptible.

I never proposed anything in my life, of a general and public nature, that Mr. Van Buren did not oppose. Nor has it happened to me to support any important measure that he did propose. And if he and I now were to find ourselves together under the Free Soil flag, I am sure, that with his accustomed good nature, he would laugh. [*Laughter.*] If nobody were present, we should both laugh [*increased laughter from the audience*] at the strange occurrences and stranger jumbles of political life, that should have brought him and me to sit down cosily and snugly, side by side, on the same platform. That the leader of the Free Spoil party should so suddenly have become the leader of the Free Soil party, would be a joke to shake his sides and mine.

Gentlemen, my first acquaintance in public life with Mr. Van Buren was when he was pressing with great power, the election of Mr. Crawford to the Presidency, against Mr. Adams. Mr. Crawford was not elected, and Mr. Adams was. Mr. Van Buren was in the Senate nearly the whole of that Administration; and during the remainder of it, he was Governor of the State of New York. And it is notorious, that he was the soul and centre, throughout the whole of Mr. Adams's term, of the opposition made to him. And he did more to prevent Mr. Adams's election in 1828, and to obtain Gen. Jackson's election, than any other man, yes, than any *ten* other men.

Gen. Jackson was chosen. Mr. Van Buren was appointed his Secretary of State. It so happened that in July, 1829, Mr. McLane went to England to arrange the controverted, difficult and disputed point on the subject of the colonial trade. Mr. Adams had held a high tone on that subject. He had demanded, as a reciprocity and a right, the introduction of our products into all parts of the British territory, freely, in our own vessels, since Great Britain was allowed to bring her produce into the United States upon the same terms. Mr. Adams placed this upon terms of reciprocity and justice. Great Britain would not yield. Mr. Van Buren, in his instructions to Mr. McLane, told him to yield that question of right, and then went on to say, that the administration in which he was Secretary of State, that is Gen. Jackson's, ought not to be debarred in England by the English government from the enjoyment of that which he was willing to call not a right, but a boon, or a privilege. Gen. Jackson's administration, he said, ought not to be refused that, on account of the misbehavior of Mr. Adams's administration. That is the sum and substance of the instruction.

Well, gentlemen, it was one of the most painful duties of my life, on account of this, to refuse my assent to Mr. Van Buren's nomination. It was novel in our history, when an administration changes, for the new administration to seek to obtain privileges on the assertion that they have abandoned the ground of their predecessors. I suppose that such a course is holden to be altogether undignified, by all public men. When I

went into the Department of State under General Harrison, I found in the conduct of my predecessor many things that I could have wished had been otherwise. Did I retract a jot or tittle of what Mr. Forsyth had said? I took the case as he had left it, and conducted it upon the principles which he left. And I should have considered that I disgraced myself, if I had said, "Pray, my Lord Ashburton, we are more rational persons than our predecessors, we are more considerate than they, and intend to adopt an entirely opposite policy. Consider, my dear Lord, how much more friendly, reasonable, and amiable we the successors are, than our predecessors."

But now, on this very subject of the extension of the slave power, I would by no means do the least injustice to Mr. Van Buren. If he has come up to some of the opinions expressed in the platform of the Buffalo Convention, I am very glad of it. I do not mean to say that there may not be very good reasons for those of his own party who cannot conscientiously vote for General Cass, to vote for him, because I think him much the least dangerous of the two.

But in truth, looking at Mr. Van Buren's conduct as President of the United States, I am amazed to find that he should be placed at the head of a party professing to be, beyond all other parties, friends of liberty and enemies of African slavery in the Southern States. Why, the very first thing that Mr. Van Buren did after he was President, was to declare that if Congress interfered with slavery in the District of Columbia he would apply the Veto to their Bills.

Mr. Van Buren in his Inaugural, quoting from his letter accepting his nomination, says that he therein declared that "I must go into the Presidential chair the inflexible and uncompromising opponent of every attempt on the part of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, against the wishes of the slaveholding States; and also with a determination equally decided to resist the slightest interference with it in the States where it exists." He then proceeds, "I submitted also to my fellow citizens, with fulness and frankness, the reasons which led me to this determination. The result authorizes me to believe that they have been approved and are confided in, by a majority of the people of the United States, including those whom they most immediately affect. It now only remains to add, that no bill conflicting with these views can ever receive my constitutional sanction."

In the next place, we know that Mr. Van Buren's casting vote was given for a law of very doubtful propriety, a law to allow Postmasters to open the mails and see if there was any incendiary matter in them, and if so, to destroy it. I do not say that there was no constitutional power to pass such a law. Perhaps the Southern statesmen thought it was necessary to protect themselves from insurrections. So far as any thing endangers the lives and property of the South, so far I agree that there may be such legislation in Congress as shall prevent such results.

But, gentlemen, no man has exercised a more controling influence on the conduct of his friends, in this country, than Mr. Van Buren. I take it, that the most important event in our time, tending to the extension of slavery and its everlasting establishment on this continent, was the annexation of Texas, in 1844. Where was Mr. Van Buren then? Let me ask,—three or four years ago, where was he THEN?

Every friend of Mr. Van Buren, so far as I know, supported the measure. The two Senators from New York supported it, and the members of the House of Representatives from New York supported it, and nobody resisted but Whigs.

And I say in the face of the world, I say in the face of those connected with, or likely to be benefited by, the Buffalo convention, I say to all of them, that there has been no party of men in this country, which has firmly and sternly resisted the progress of the Slave Power but the Whigs.

Why, look to this very question of the annexation of Texas. We talk of the dictation of the Slave Power! At least they do, I do not. I do not allow that any body dictates to me. They talk of the triumph of the South over the North! There is not a word of truth or reason in the whole of it. I am bound to say, on my conscience, that of all the evils inflicted upon us by these acquisitions of slave territory, the North has borne its full part in the infliction. Northern votes, in full proportion, have been given in both Houses, for the extension of territory, and for the extension of slave territory.

We talk of the North. There has been no North. I think the North Star is at last discovered; I think there *will be a North;* but up to the recent session of Congress there has been no North. What I mean to say is, I am to understand a geographical section of the country, in which there has been found a strong, conscientious, and *united* opposition to Slavery, no such North has existed.

Pope says, you know,

> "Ask 'where's the North?' At York, 'tis on the Tweed;
> In Scotland, at the Orcades; and there,
> At Greenland, Zembla, or the Lord knows where."

Now, if there has heretofore been such a *North* as I have described, a North, strong in opinion and united in action against Slavery, if such a *North* has existed any where, it has existed 'the Lord knows where,' I do not. Why, on this very question of the admission of Texas, it may be said with truth, that the North let in Texas. The Whigs, North and South, resisted Texas. Ten Senators from slave holding States, of the Whig party, resisted Texas. Two only, as I remember, voted for it. But the Southern Whig votes against Texas were overpowered by the Democratic votes from the free States, and from New England among the rest Yes, if there had not been votes from New England in favor of Texas, Texas would have been out to this day. Yes, if men from New England had been true, Texas would have been nothing but Texas still.

There were four votes in the Senate from New England in favor of the admission of Texas, Mr. Van Buren's friends, Democratic members: one from Maine; two from New Hampshire; one from Connecticut. Two of these gentlemen were confidential friends of Mr. Van Buren, and had both been members of his Cabinet. They voted for Texas; and they let in Texas, against Southern Whigs and Northern Whigs. That is the truth of it, my friends. Mr. Van Buren, by the wave of his hand, could have kept out Texas. A word, a letter, though it had been even shorter than Gen. Cass's letter to the Chicago Convention, would have been enough, and would have done the work. But he was silent.

When Northern members of Congress voted, in 1818, for the Missouri Compromise, against the known will of their constituents, they were called "Dough Faces." I am afraid, fellow citizens, that the generation of "dough faces" will be as perpetual as the generation of men.

In 1844, as we all know, Mr. Van Buren was a candidate for the Presidency, on the part of the Democratic party, but lost the nomination at Baltimore. And we now learn from a letter from General Jackson to Mr. Butler, that Mr. Van Buren's claims were superseded because, after all,

the South thought that the accomplishment of the annexation of Texas might be more safely intrusted to Southern hands. We all know that the Northern portion of the Democratic party were friendly to Mr. Van Buren. Our neighbors from New Hampshire, and Maine, and elsewhere, were Van Buren men. But the moment it was ascertained that Mr. Polk was the favorite of the South, and the favorite of the South upon the ground that I have mentioned, as a man more certain to bring about the annexation of Texas than Mr. Van Buren, these friends of Mr. Van Buren in the North all "caved in;" not a man of them stood. Mr. Van Buren himself wrote a letter very complimentary to Mr. Polk and Mr. Dallas, and found no fault with the nomination.

Now, gentlemen, if they were "dough faces" who voted for the Missouri Compromise, what epithet shall describe these men, here in our New England, who were so ready, not only to change or abandon him whom they most cordially wished to support, but did so in order to make more sure the annexation of Texas.

They nominated Mr. Polk at the request of gentlemen of the South, and voted for him, through thick and thin, till the work was accomplished, and Mr. Polk elected.

For my part, I think that "dough faces" is an epithet not sufficiently reproachful. Now, I think, such persons are dough faces, with dough heads, and dough hearts, and dough souls; [*Shouts of laughter*] that they are *all* dough; that the coarsest potter may mould them to vessels of honor or dishonor,—most readily to vessels of *dis*honor.

Now, what do we see! Repentance has gone far. There are among these very people, these very gentlemen, persons who espouse, with great zeal the interests of the Free Soil party. I hope their repentance is as sincere as it appears to be. I hope it is honest conviction, and not merely a new chance for power, under a new name and a new party. But, with all their pretensions, and with all their patriotism, I see dough still sticking on some of their cheeks. And therefore I have no confidence, not a particle. I do not mean to say, that the great mass of the people, especially those who went to that Convention from this State, have not the highest and purest motives. I think they act unwisely, but I acquit them of dishonest intentions. But with respect to others, and those who have been part and parcel, those who have brought slavery into this Union, I distrust them all. If they repent, let them, before we trust them, do works worthy of repentance.

I have said, gentlemen, that in my opinion, if it were desirable to place Mr. Van Buren at the head of Government, there is no chance for him. Others are as good judges as I am. But I am not able to say that I see any State in the Union in which there is a reasonable probability that he will get the vote. There may be. Others are more versed in such statistics than I am. But I see none, and therefore I think that the issue is reduced exactly to be between Gen. Cass and Gen. Taylor.

You may remember, that in the discussions of 1844, when Mr. Birney was drawing off votes from the Whig candidate, I said that every vote for Mr. Birney was half a vote for Mr. Polk. Is it not true that the Liberty vote abstracted from Mr. Clay's vote in the State of New York, made Mr. Polk President? That is as clear as any historical fact. And in my judgment, it will be so now. I consider every Whig vote given to Mr. Van Buren, directly aiding the election of Mr. Cass. Mark, I say, *Whig* vote. Now there may be States in which Mr. Van Buren may draw from the other side largely. But I speak of Whig votes, in this

State and in any State. And I am of opinion that any such vote given to Mr. Van Buren, inures for Gen. Cass.

Now as to Gen. Cass, gentlemen. We need not go to the Baltimore platform to instruct ourselves as to what his politics are, or how he will conduct the Government. Gen. Cass will go into the Government, if at all, by the same party that elected Mr. Polk; and he will "follow in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor." [*Laughter.*] I hold him, I confess, in the present state of the country, to be the most dangerous man in whom the powers of the executive Chief Magistracy could well be placed. He would consider himself not as conservative, not as protective to present institutions, but as belonging to the party of the *Progress*. He believes in the doctrine of American destiny; and that that destiny is to go through wars, and invasions, and maintain vast armies, to establish a great, powerful, domineering government over all this continent. We know that if Mr. Cass could have prevented it, the treaty with England in 1842 would not have been made; we know that if Mr. Cass could have prevented it, the settlement of the Oregon question would not have been accomplished in 1846.

We know that Gen. Cass could have prevented the Mexican war; and we know that he was first and foremost in pressing that war. We know that he is a man of talent, of ability, of some celebrity as a statesman, in every way superior to his predecessor, if he should be the successor of Mr. Polk. But I think him a man of rash politics, pushed on by a rash party, and committed to a course of policy, as I believe, not in consistency with the happiness and security of the country. Therefore it is for you, and for me, and for all of us, Whigs, to consider, whether in this state of the case we can, or cannot, we will, or will not, give our votes for the Whig nomination. I leave that to every man's conscience. I have endeavored to state the case as it presents itself to me.

Gentlemen, before Gen. Taylor's nomination, I stated always, when the subject was mentioned by my friends, that I did not and could not recommend the nomination of a military man to the people of the United States, for the office of President. It was against my conviction of what was due to the best interests of the country, and to the character of the republic. I stated always, at the same time, that if Gen. Taylor should be nominated by the Whig convention, fairly, I should not oppose his election. I stand now upon the same declaration.

Gen. Taylor has been nominated fairly, as far as I know, and I cannot, therefore, and shall not, oppose his election. At the same time, there is no man who is more firmly of opinion that such a nomination was not fit to be made. But the declaration, that I would not oppose Gen. Taylor, if nominated by the Whig party, was of course, subject, in the nature of things, to some exceptions. If I believed him to be a man who would plunge the country into further wars for any purpose of ambition or conquest, I would oppose him, let him be nominated by whom he might. If I believed that he was a man who would exert his official influence for the further extension of the slave power, I would oppose him, let him be nominated by whom he might. But I do not believe either. [*Applause.*]

I believe that he has been, from the first, opposed to the policy of the Mexican war, as improper, impolitic and inexpedient. I believe from the best information I can obtain, and you will take this as my opinion, gentlemen, I believe, from the best information I can obtain, that he has no disposition to go to war, or to increase the limits of slavery to form new States.

Gentlemen, so much for what may be considered as belonging to the Presidency as a national question. But, the case by no means stops here. We are citizens of Massachusetts. We are Whigs of Massachusetts. We have supported the present government of the State for years, with success; and I have thought that most Whigs were satisfied with the administration of the State government in the hands of those who have had it. But now it is proposed, I presume, on the basis of the Buffalo platform, to carry this into the State elections, as well as into the national elections. There is to be a nomination of a candidate for Governor, against Mr. Briggs, or whoever may be nominated by the Whigs; and there is to be a nomination of a candidate for Lieutenant Governor, against Mr. Reed, or whoever may be nominated by the Whigs; and there are to be nominations against the present members of Congress. Now, what is the utility or the necessity of this? We have ten members in the Congress of the United States. I know not ten men of any party who are more zealous, and firm, and inflexible in their opposition against slavery in any form.

And what will be the result? Suppose that a considerable number of Whigs secede from the Whig party and support a candidate of this new party, what will be the result? Do we not know what has been the case in this State? Do not we know that this District has been unrepresented from month to month, and from year to year, because there has been an opposition to as good an anti-slavery man as breathes the air of this District? On this occasion, and even in his own presence, I may allude to our Representative, Mr. Hale. Do we want a man to give a better vote in Congress than Mr. Hale gives? Why, I undertake to say that there is not one of the Liberty party, nor will there be one of this new party, who will have the least objection to Mr. Hale, except that he was not nominated by themselves Ten to one, if the Whigs had not nominated him, they would have nominated him themselves; doubtless they would, if he had come into their organization, and called himself a third party man.

Now, gentlemen, I remember it to have occurred, that on very important questions in Congress, the vote was lost for want of two or three members which Massachusetts might have sent, but which, in consequence of the division of parties, she did not send. And now I foresee that if in this District any considerable number of Whigs think it their duty to join in the support of Mr. Van Buren, and in the support of gentlemen whom that party may nominate for Congress, I foresee the same thing will take place, and we shall be without a Representative, in all probability, in the first session of the next Congress, when the battle is to be fought on this very slavery question. And the same is likely to happen in other Districts. I am sure that honest, intelligent and patriotic Whigs, will lay this consideration to their consciences, and judge of it as they think they ought to do.

Gentlemen, I will detain you but a moment longer. You know that I gave my vote in Congress against the treaty of peace with Mexico because it contained these cessions of territory, and brought under the authority of the United States, with a pledge of future admission into the Union, the great, vast, and almost unknown countries of New Mexico and California.

In the session before the last, one of the Southern Whig Senators, Mr. Berrien of Georgia, had moved a resolution, to the effect that the war ought not to be continued for the purposes of conquest and acquisition. The Resolution declared that the war with Mexico ought not to be prose-

cuted by this Government with any view to the dismemberment of that Republic, or to the acquisition, by conquest, of any portion of her territory. That proposition he introduced in the form of a resolution into Congress; and I believe that every Whig in the Senate, but one, voted for it. But the Senators belonging to the Loco Foco or Democratic party voted against it. The Senators from New York voted against it. Gen. Cass, from the free State of Michigan; Mr. Fairfield, from Maine; Mr. Niles, from Connecticut; and others, voted against it, and the vote was lost. That is, these gentlemen, some of them very prominent friends of Mr. Van Buren, and ready to take the field for him, these very gentlemen voted not to exclude territory, that might be obtained by conquest. They were willing to bring in the territory and then have a squabble and controversy, whether it should be slave or free territory. I was of opinion that the true and safe policy was, to shut out the whole question by getting no territory, and thereby keep off all controversy. The territory will do us no good, if free; it will be an incumbrance, if free. To a great extent it will produce a preponderance in favor of the South in the Senate, even if it be free. Let us keep it out therefore. But no. We will make the acquisition, bring in the territory, and manage it afterwards. That was the policy.

Gentlemen, in an important crisis, in English history, in the reign of Charles 2d, when the country was threatened by the accession to the throne of a Prince, then called the Duke of York, who was a bigot to the Roman Catholic religion, a proposition was made to exclude him from the crown. Some said that was a very rash measure, brought forward by very rash men, that they had better admit him, and then put limitations upon him, chain him down, restrict him. When the debate was going on, a gentleman is reported to have risen and expressed his sentiments by rather a grotesque comparison, but one of considerable force.

> "I hear a lion, in the lobby, roar!
> Say, Mr. Speaker, shall we shut the door,
> And keep him out; or shall we let him in,
> And see if we can get him out again?"

I was for shutting the door and keeping the lion out. Other more confident spirits, who are of the character of Wombwell, were for letting him in, and disturbing all the interests of the country. And when this Mexican treaty came before the Senate, it had certain clauses ceding New Mexico and California to the United States. A Southern gentleman, Mr. Badger, of North Carolina, moved to strike out those clauses. Now you understand, that if a motion to strike out a clause be supported by one-third, it will be struck out, that is, two-thirds of the Senate must vote for each clause, in order to have it retained. The vote on this question of striking out stood 38 to 14; not quite one-third being against the cession, and so the clause was retained.

And why were there not one-third? Just because there were four New England Senators voting for these new territories. That is the reason.

I hope I am as ardent an advocate for peace as any man living; but I would not be carried away by the desire for peace to commit an act which I believed highly injurious, likely to have consequences of a permanent character, and indeed to endanger the existence of the Government. Besides, I believed that we could have struck out the cessions of territory, and had peace just as soon. And I would be willing to go before the people and leave it to them to say, whether they would carry on the war

any longer for acquisition of territory. If they would, then they were the artificers of their own fortunes. I was not afraid of the people on that subject. But if it had continued the war some time longer, I would have preferred that the war should continue some time longer, rather than that those territories lying on our southern border, should come in hereafter as new States. I should speak, perhaps, with more confidence, if some Whigs of the North had not voted for the treaty. My own opinion was then clear and decisive. I thought the case a perfectly plain one, and no man has yet stated a reason to convince me to the contrary.

I voted to strike out the articles of cession. They would have been struck out if four of the New England Senators had voted it. I then voted against the ratification of the treaty, and that treaty would have failed if three New England Senators had voted as I did, and Whig Senators too. I should do the same thing again, and with much more resolution. I would have ran a still greater risk, I would have endured a still greater shock, before I would have risked any thing, rather than have been a participator in any thing which should have a tendency to annex southern territory to the States of the Union. I hope it will be remembered, in all future time, that on this question of the accession of these new territories of almost boundless extent, I voted against them, and against the treaty which contained them, notwithstanding all inducements to the contrary, and all the cries, which I thought hasty and injudicious, of "Peace! peace, on any terms." I will add, that those who voted against the treaty were gentlemen from so many parts of the country, that its rejection would have been rather a national, than a local resistance to it. There were votes against it from both parties, and from all parties, the South and the West, the North and the East. What we wanted was a few more New England votes.

Gentlemen, after I had the honor of receiving the invitation to meet my fellow citizens, I found it necessary in the discharge of my duty, though with great inconvenience to my health, to be present at the closing scenes of the session. You know what there transpired. You know the important decision that was made in both houses of Congress, in regard to Oregon. The immediate question respected Oregon, or rather the bill respected Oregon, but the question more particularly these new territories.

The effect of the bill as passed in the Senate was to establish these new territories as slaveholding States. The House disagreed. The Senate receded from their ground, and the bill passed, establishing Oregon as a free territory, and making no provision for the newly acquired territories on the South.

Now, gentlemen, my vote and the reasons I gave for it are known to the good people of Massachusetts, and I have not heard that they have expressed any particular disapprobation of them. [*Applause.*]

But this question is to be resumed the first session of the next Congress, I think not in this Congress, I think at least there is no probability that it will be settled at the next session of this Congress; but the first session of the next Congress, this question will be resumed. It will enter at this very period into all the elections of the South.

And now I venture to say, gentlemen, two things: the first well known to you, that General Cass is in favor of what is called the Compromise Line; and is of opinion that the Wilmot Proviso, or the Ordinance of 1787, which excludes slavery from territories, ought not to be applied to territories lying south of 36 deg. 30 min. He announced this before he was nominated, and if he had not announced it, he would have been

thirty-six degrees thirty minutes farther off from being nominated. In the next place, he will do all he can to establish that compromise line; and lastly, which is a matter of opinion, in my conscientious belief, he will establish it.

Give him the power and the patronage of the government, let him exercise it over certain portions of the country whose representatives voted on this occasion to put off that question for future consideration, to settle it that Oregon shall be free, and leave New Mexico and California to be decided hereafter; let him have the power of this government with his attachments, with his inducements, and we shall see the result. I verily believe that unless there is a renewed strength, an augmented strength of Whig votes in Congress, he will accomplish his purpose. He will surely have the Senate, and with the patronage of the government, with every interest which he can bring to bear, co-operating with every interest which the South can bring to bear, he will establish the compromise line. We cry safety, before we are out of the woods, if we feel that the danger, respecting the territories, is over.

Gentlemen, I came here to confer with you as friends and countrymen, to speak my own mind and hear yours; but if we all should speak, and occupy as much time as I have, we should make a late meeting. I shall detain you no longer.

I have been long in public life, longer, far longer, than I shall remain there. I have had some participation for more than thirty years in the councils of the nation; I profess to feel a strong attachment to the liberty of the United States, to the constitution and free institutions of this country, to the honor, and I may say the glory, of my native land.

I feel every injury inflicted upon it, almost as a personal injury. I blush for every fault which I think I see committed in its public councils, as if they were faults or mistakes of my own.

I know that at this moment, there is no object upon earth so much attracting the gaze of the intelligent and civilized nations of the earth as this great Republic. All men look at us, all men examine our course, all good men are anxious for a favorable result to this great experiment of Republican liberty.

We are on a hill and cannot be hid. We cannot withdraw ourselves either from the commendation or the reproaches of the civilized world. They see us as that star of empire which half a century ago was represented to be making its way westward. I wish they may see it as a mild, placid, though brilliant orb, making its way, athwart the whole heavens, to the enlightening and cheering of mankind: and not a meteor of fire and blood, terrifying the nations.

MR. WEBSTER'S SPEECH

ON THE

OREGON BILL,

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, SATURDAY EVENING, AUG. 12, 1848.

THE question being on the motion by Mr. BENTON, that the Senate recede from its amendments, to which the House had refused to agree:

Mr. WEBSTER rose and said: I am very little inclined to prolong this debate, and I hope I am utterly disinclined to bring into it any new warmth or excitement. I wish to say a few words, however, first, upon the question as it is presented to us, as a parliamentary question; and secondly, upon the general political question involved in the debate.

As a question of parliamentary proceeding, I understand the case to be this: The House of Representatives sent us a bill for the establishment of a Territorial Government in Oregon; and no motion has been made in the Senate to strike out any part of that bill. The bill purporting to respect Oregon, simply and alone, has not been the subject of any objection in this branch of the legislature. The Senate has proposed no important amendment to this bill, affecting Oregon itself; and the honorable member from Missouri (Mr. Benton) was right, precisely right, when he said that the amendment now under consideration had no relation to Oregon. That is perfectly true; and therefore the amendment which the Senate has adopted and the House has disagreed to, has no connection with the immediate subject before it. The truth is, that it is an amendment by which the Senate wish to have now, a public, legal declaration, not respecting Oregon, but respecting the newly acquired territories of California and New Mexico. It wishes now to make a line of Slavery, which shall include those new Territories. The amendment says that the line of the "Missouri compromise" shall be the line to the Pacific; and then goes on to say, in the language of the bill as it now stands, that the Ordinance of '87 shall be applicable to Oregon; and therefore I say that the amendment proposed is foreign to the immediate object of the bill. It does nothing to modify, restrain or affect, in any way, the government which we propose to establish over Oregon, or the condition or character of that government or of the people under it. In a parliamentary view, this is the state of the case.

Now, Sir, this amendment has been attached to this bill by a strong majority of the Senate. That majority had the right, as it had the power,

to pass it. The House disagreed to that amendment. Well, if the majority of the Senate, who attached it to the bill, are of opinion that a conference with the House will lead to some adjustment of the question, by which this amendment, or something equivalent to it, may be adopted by the House, it is very proper for them to urge a conference. It is very fair, quite parliamentary, and there is not a word to be said against it. But my position is that of one who voted against the amendment, who thinks that it ought not to be attached to this bill, and therefore I naturally vote for the motion to get rid of it, that is, "to recede."

So much for the parliamentary question. Now, there are two or three political questions arising in this case, which I wish to state dispassionately: not to argue, but to state.

The honorable member from Georgia, (Mr. Berrien) for whom I have great respect, and with whom it is my delight to cultivate personal friendship, has stated, with great propriety, the importance of this question. He has said, that it is a question interesting to the South and to the North, and one which may very well, also, attract the attention of mankind. He has not stated all this too strongly. It is such a question. Without doubt, it is a question which may well attract the attention of mankind. On the subjects involved in this debate, the whole world is not now asleep. It is wide awake; and I agree with the honorable member, that, if what is now proposed to be done by us who resist this amendment, is, as he supposes, unjust and injurious to any portion of this community or against its constitutional rights, that injustice should be presented to the civilized world, and we, who concur in the proceeding, ought to submit ourselves to its rebuke. I am glad that the honorable gentleman proposes to refer this question to the great tribunal of Modern Civilization, as well as the great tribunal of the American People. It is proper. It is a question of magnitude enough, of interest enough, to all the civilized nations of the earth, to call from those who support the one side or the other a statement of the grounds upon which they act.

Now, I propose to state, as briefly as I can, the grounds upon which I proceed, historical and constitutional; and will endeavor to use as few words as possible, so that I may relieve the Senate from hearing me at the earliest possible moment.

In the first place, to view the matter historically: this Constitution, founded in 1787, and the Government under it, organized in 1789, does recognize the existence of Slavery in certain States, then existing in the Union; and a particular description of Slavery. I hope that what I am about to say may be received, without any supposition that I intend the slightest disrespect. But this particular description of Slavery does not, I believe, now exist in Europe, nor in any other civilized portions of the habitable globe. It is not a Predial Slavery. It is not analogous to the case of the *Predial* Slaves, or Slaves *glebæ adscripti* of Russia, or Hungary, or other States. It is a peculiar system of personal Slavery, by which the person who is called a Slave is transferrable as a chattel, from hand to hand. I speak of this as a fact. And that is the fact; and I will say farther, perhaps other gentlemen may remember the instances, that although Slavery, as a system of servitude attached to the earth, exists in various countries of Europe, I am not at the present moment aware of any place on the globe, in which this property of man in a human being as a Slave, transferable as a chattel, exists except in America. Now, that it existed in the form, in which it still exists, in certain States, at the formation of this Constitution, and the framers of that instrument, and those

who adopted it, agreed that, as far as it existed, it should not be disturbed, or interfered with by the new General Government, there is no doubt.

The Constitution of the United States recognizes it as an existing fact, an existing relation between the inhabitants of the Southern States. I do not call it an "institution," because that term is not applicable to it; for that seems to imply a voluntary establishment. I have been here so long that when I first came here it was a matter of reproach to England, the mother country, that slavery had been entailed upon the colonies by her, against their consent, and that which is now considered a cherished "institution," was then regarded as, I will not say an entailed *evil*, but an entailment on the colonies by the policy of the mother country against their wishes. At any rate, it stands upon the Constitution. The Constitution was adopted in 1788, and went into operation in 1789. When it was adopted, the state of the country was this: slavery existed in the Southern States; there was a very large extent of unoccupied territory, the whole Northwest, which, it was understood, was destined to be formed into States; and it was then determined that no slavery should exist in this territory. I gather now, as a matter of inference from the history of the time, and the history of the debates, that the prevailing motives with the North for agreeing to this recognition of the existence of Slavery in the Southern States, and giving a representation to those States, founded in part upon their slaves, was rested on the supposition that no acquisition of territory would be made to form new States on the Southern frontier of this country, either by cession or conquest. It is plain, that taking the history of the times together, the reason why the slave representation was allowed, was that since the Northwest Territory was destined by the ordinance to be free, and since nobody looked to any acquisition by conquest or cession for the creation of slave States at the South, there was an insisting on the part of the South to suffer slavery where it did exist, and to be represented according to the principles and provisions of the Constitution, inasmuch as it was limited by these two considerations; first, that there was to be no slavery in the Territories; and second, that there was not the least anticipation of the acquisition of any new territory. And now, sir, I am one who, understanding that to be the purpose of the Constitution, mean to abide by it.

There is another principle, equally clear, by which I mean to abide; and that is, that in the Convention, and in the first Congress, when appealed to on the subject by petitions, and all along in the history of this government, it was and has been a conceded point, that Slavery, in the States in which it did exist, was a matter of State regulation exclusively, and that Congress had not the least power over it, or right to interfere with it. Therefore, I say that all agitations and attempts to disturb the relations between master and slave, by persons not living in the slave States, are unconstitutional in their spirit, and are, in my opinion, productive of nothing but evil and mischief. I countenance none of them. The manner in which the governments of those States, where slavery exists, are to regulate it, is for their own consideration, under their responsibility to their constituents, to the general laws of propriety, humanity and justice, and to God. Associations formed elsewhere, springing from a feeling of humanity, or any other cause, have nothing whatever to do with it, nor right to interfere with it. They have never received any encouragement from me, and they never will. In my opinion they have done nothing but to delay and defeat their own professed objects. I have now stated, as I understand it, the state of things upon the adoption of the Constitution of the United

States. What has happened since? Sir, it has happened that, above and beyond all contemplation or expectation of the original framers of the Constitution, or the People who adopted it, foreign territory has been acquired by cession, first from France, and then from Spain, on our Southern frontier. And what has been the result of that? Five slaveholding States have been created and added to the Union, bringing ten Senators into this body, (I include Texas, which I consider in the light of a foreign acquisition also,) and up to this hour in which I address you, not one free State has been admitted to the Union from all this acquired territory, not one!

Mr. Berrien (in his seat)—Yes, Iowa.

Mr. Webster.—Iowa is not yet in the Union. Her Senators are not here. When she comes in there will be one to five, one free State to five slave, formed out of new territories. Now, it seems strange to me that there should be any complaint of injustice exercised by the North toward the South. Northern votes have been necessary, they have been ready, and they have been rendered to aid the formation of these five new slaveholding States. These are facts; and as the gentleman from Georgia has very properly put it as a case in which we are to present ourselves before the world for its judgment, let us now see how we stand. I do not represent the North. I state my own case; and present the matter in that light, in which I am willing, as an individual member of Congress, to be judged by civilized humanity. I say, then, that according to true history, the slaveholding interest in this country has not been a disfavored interest; it has not been disfavored by the North. The North has concurred to bring in these five slaveholding States out of newly acquired territory, which acquisitions were never at all in the contemplation of the Convention which formed the Constitution, or of the people when they agreed that there should be a representation of three fifths of the slaves in the then existing States.

Mr. President, what is the result of this? We stand here now, at least I do, for one, to say, that considering that there have been already five new slaveholding States formed out of newly acquired territory, and one only, at most, non-slaveholding State, I do not feel that I am called on to go farther; I do not feel the obligation to yield more. But our friends of the South say, You deprive us of all our rights. We have fought for this territory, and you deny us participation in it. Let us consider this question as it really is; and since the honorable gentlemen from Georgia proposes to leave the case to the enlightened and impartial judgment of mankind, and as I agree with him that it is a case proper to be considered by the enlightened part of mankind, let us consider how the matter, in truth, stands. Gentlemen who advocate the case which my honorable friend from Georgia, with so much ability, sustains, declare, that we invade their rights, that we deprive them of a participation in the enjoyment of territories acquired by the common services and common exertions of all. Is this true? How deprived? Of what do we deprive them? Why, they say that we deprive them of the privilege of carrying their slaves, as slaves, into the new territories. Well, sir, what is the amount of that? They say that in this way we deprive them of the opportunity of going into this acquired territory with their property. Their "property?" What do they mean by "property?" We certainly do not deprive them of the privilege of going into these newly acquired territories with all that, in the general estimate of human society, in the general, and common, and universal understanding of mankind, is esteemed property. Not at all. The

truth is just this: They have, in their own States, peculiar laws, which create property in persons. They have a system of local legislation on which slavery rests; while everybody agrees that it is against natural law, or at least against the common understanding which prevails among men as to what is natural law.

I am not going into metaphysics, for therein I should encounter the Hon. member from South Carolina, and we should wander in "endless mazes lost," until after the time for the adjournment of Congress. The Southern States have peculiar laws, and by those laws there is property in slaves. This is purely local. The real meaning, then, of Southern gentlemen, in making this complaint, is that they cannot go into the territories of the United States carrying with them their own peculiar local law, a law which creates property in persons. This, according to their own statement, is all the ground of complaint they have. Now here, I think, gentlemen are unjust towards us. How unjust they are, others will judge, generations that will come after us will judge. It will not be contended that this sort of personal slavery exists by general law. It exists only by local law. I do not mean to deny the validity of that local law where it is established; but I say it is, after all, local law. It is nothing more. And wherever that local law does not extend, property in persons does not exist. Well, sir, what is now the demand on the part of our Southern friends? They say, "We will carry our local laws with us wherever we go. We insist that Congress does us injustice unless it establishes in the territory in which we wish to go, our own local law." This demand I, for one, resist, and shall resist. It goes upon the idea that there is an inequality, unless persons under this local law, and holding property by authority of that law, can go into new territory and there establish that local law, to the exclusion of the general law. Mr. President, it was a maxim of the civil law, that between slavery and freedom, freedom should always be presumed, and slavery must always be proved. If any question arose as to the *status* of an individual in Rome, he was presumed to be free until he was proved to be a slave. Because slavery is an exception to the general rule. So, I suppose, is the general law of mankind. An individual is to be presumed to be free, until a law can be produced which creates ownership in his person. I do not dispute the force and validity of the local law, as I have already said; but, I say, it is a matter to be proved; and, therefore, if individuals go into any part of the earth, it is to be proved that they are not freemen, or else the presumption is that they are.

Now, our friends seem to think that an inequality arises from restraining them from going into the territories, unless there be a law provided which shall protect their ownership in persons. The assertion is, that we create an inequality. Is there nothing to be said on the other side, in relation to inequality? Sir, from the date of this Constitution, and in the councils that formed and established this Constitution, and I suppose in all men's judgment since, it is received as a settled truth, that slave labor and free labor do not exist well together. I have before me a declaration of Mr. Mason, in the convention that formed the Constitution, to that effect. Mr. Mason, as is well known, was a distinguished member from Virginia. He says that the objection to slave labor is, that it puts free white labor in disrepute; that it makes labor to be regarded as derogatory to the character of the free white man, and that the free white man despises to work, to use his expression, where slaves are employed. This is a matter of great interest to the free States, if it be true, as to a great extent it certainly is, that wherever slave labor prevails, free white labor is excluded or discour-

aged. I agree that slave labor does not necessarily exclude free labor, totally. There is free white labor in Virginia, Tennessee, and other States, where most of the labor is done by slaves. But it necessarily loses something of its respectability, by the side of, and when associated with, slave labor. Wherever labor is mainly performed by slaves, it is regarded as degrading to free men. The free men of the North, therefore, have a deep interest to keep labor free, exclusively free, in the new territories.

But, sir, let us look farther into this alleged inequality. There is no pretence that Southern people may not go into territory which shall be subject to the ordinance of 1787. The only restraint is that they shall not carry slaves thither and continue that relation. They say this shuts them altogether out. Why, sir, there can be nothing more inaccurate in point of fact than this statement. I understand that one half the people who settled Illinois, are people, or descendants of people, who came from the Southern States. And I suppose that one third of the people of Ohio are those, or descendants of those, who emigrated from the South; and I venture to say, that in respect to those two States, they are at this day settled by people of Southern origin in as great a proportion as they are by people of Northern origin, according to the general numbers and proportion of people, South and North. There are as many people from the South, in proportion to the whole people of the South, in those States, as there are from the North, in proportion to the whole people of the North. *There is, then, no exclusion of Southern people; there is only the exclusion of a peculiar local law.* Neither in principle nor in fact is there any inequality.

The question now is, whether it is not competent to Congress, in the exercise of a fair and just discretion, to say that, considering that there have been five slaveholding States added to this Union out of foreign acquisitions, and as yet only one free State; under this state of things it is unreasonable or unjust, in the slightest degree, to prevent their further increase. That is the question. I see no injustice in it. As to the power of Congress, I have nothing to add to what I said the other day. Congress has full power over the subject. It may establish any such government, and any such laws, in the territories, as in its discretion, it may see fit. It is subject, of course to the rules of justice and propriety; but it is under no constitutional restraints.

I have said that I shall consent to no extension of the area of slavery, upon this continent; nor to any increase of slave representation in the other House of Congress.

I have now stated my reasons for my conduct and my vote. We of the North have gone, in this respect, already far beyond all that any Southern man could have expected, or did expect, at the time of the adoption of the Constitution. I repeat the statement of the fact, of the creation of five new slave-holding States out of newly acquired territory. We have done that which, if those who framed the Constitution had foreseen, they never would have agreed to slave representation. We have yielded thus far; and we have now in the House of Representatives twenty persons voting upon this very question; and upon all other questions, who are there only in virtue of the representation of slaves.

Let me conclude, therefore, by remarking that while I am willing to present this as showing my own judgment and position, in regard to this case, and I beg it to be understood that I am speaking for no other than myself, and while I am willing to offer it to the whole world, as my own justification, I rest on these propositions:—*First:* That when

this Constitution was adopted, nobody looked for any new acquisition of territory to be formed into slaveholding States. *Secondly:* That the principles of the Constitution prohibited, and were intended to prohibit, and should be construed to prohibit, all interference of the General Government with slavery as it existed and as it still exists in the States. And then, that looking to the effect of these new acquisitions, which have in this great degree enured to strengthen that interest in the South by the addition of these five States, there is nothing unjust, nothing of which any honest man can complain, if he is intelligent; and I feel there is nothing which the civilized world, if they take notice of so humble a person as myself, will reproach me with, when I say, as I said the other day, that I had made up my mind, for one, that under no circumstances would I consent to the farther extension of the area of slavery in the United States, or to the farther increase of Slave Representation in the House of Representatives.

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Webster, Daniel,
1782-1852

Mr. Webster's speech at Marshfield, Mass., delivered September 1, 1848, and his speech on the Oregon bill, delivered in the United States Senate, August 12, 1848.

Press of T. R. Marvin (1848)

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